Construction Estimator

Work out what a building will cost before anybody breaks ground, and put the company's money behind the number.

TYPICAL PAY **$78,740** a year, full time	PAY RANGE **$49k to $131k** starting to experienced	TIME TO QUALIFY **2 to 4 years** after high school
DEMAND **Limited** job outlook	LICENCE NEEDED **No** anyone can do it	WHERE YOU WORK **Contractor offices, job site trailers, plan rooms, home office**

How you get there

1. **High school with strong math** — Grade 12
   Geometry and algebra are the daily tools. Drafting or shop class helps you read a drawing.
2. **A construction degree, or a trade** — 2 to 5 years
   An associate or bachelor's in construction management, or three to five years working in a trade so you know what the work really costs.
3. **Junior estimator** — 1 to 3 years
   Quantity takeoffs, calling subcontractors for quotes, filling in the bid form. You learn the company's numbers.
4. **Own your own bids** — 3 to 6 years in
   You price whole projects and the company's money rides on it. Mistakes here are expensive and public.
5. **Chief estimator or preconstruction manager** — 8 years and up
   Running the bid department, deciding which jobs to chase, setting the markup.

Pros and cons

+ Construction pay without the physical damage
+ A clear route in from the tools, with no degree required
+ Your work decides whether the company wins the job, so it matters

– Bid deadlines mean genuine crunch weeks, not gentle overtime
– You are judged on a number that will be tested for the next two years
– Most bids lose, and losing is the normal outcome

Good to know

Most bids lose on purpose
A contractor bidding public work may win one job in five or fewer. Estimators spend most of their year producing careful numbers that nobody buys, and the firm treats that as the cost of being in business.

A missed line item can cost millions
If you leave a system out of the estimate and the company signs a fixed price contract, the company eats the difference. That is why senior estimators review each other's work and why the job pays wh...

Optional boosts

Estimating and takeoff software. Building information modeling. A specialty trade. Heavy civil work.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Cost Estimators (13-1051.00)
American Society of Professional Estimators
AACE International: cost engineering certifications
Purdue University: construction management technology degree

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: https://career.help/us/careers/construction-estimator

Scan for the full clicker